

VZCZCXYZ0001  
OO RUEHWEB

DE RUEHDM #0033/01 0101249  
ZNR UUUUU ZZH  
O 101249Z JAN 07  
FM AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS  
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 2769  
RHEHAAA/WHITE HOUSE WASHDC IMMEDIATE  
RUEHAM/AMEMBASSY AMMAN 6490  
RUEHLB/AMEMBASSY BEIRUT 4272  
RUEHEG/AMEMBASSY CAIRO 2877  
RUEHRH/AMEMBASSY RIYADH 7447  
RUEHTV/AMEMBASSY TEL AVIV 1494  
RUEHAK/AMEMBASSY ANKARA 4835  
RUEHJM/AMCONSUL JERUSALEM 1054  
RHMFISS/HQ USCENTCOM MACDILL AFB FL//CCPA//  
INFO RUEHNC/AMEMBASSY NICOSIA 7178

UNCLAS DAMASCUS 000033

SIPDIS

SIPDIS

DEPARTMENT FOR PA, NEA/ARN, INR/IC/CD, INR/R/MR:STHIBEAULT AND  
JMCCARTER, VOA NEWS CA, NEA/PPD:CBOURGEOIS, AZAIBACK, AND  
AFERNANDEZ, IIP/G/NEA-SA MDAVIDSON  
WHITE HOUSE FOR NSC  
CENTCOM FOR CCPA

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [KMDR](#) [PREL](#) [KPAO](#) [OPRC](#) [SY](#)

SUBJECT: Syria/Iraq, Syria/US, Iraq, Lebanon, Palestinian  
Territories (12/28)

11. Summary: Syrian papers on Dec. 28 reported that President Asad received a message from Iraqi President Jalal Talabani. The message was handed by the Iraqi President's special envoy Fakhri Karim during a meeting with Asad. Talks dealt with developments in Iraq and bilateral relations.

Papers also reported that Minister of Information Mohsen Bilal emphasized, in an interview with al-Jazeera satellite channel on Dec. 28, that Syria's positions on the region's issues are firm and will never be changed, adding that "those who called for wars, re-mapping the region and establishing the so-called New Middle east have changed." "All attempts to isolate Syria have failed," Bilal said, pointing to the European and US governmental and parliamentary officials who have been visiting Syria for consultations. "Syria has always called for dialogue and peaceful solutions," the Minister noted, adding that the problem with the US is to find just solutions for the region's problems. As for the Baker-Hamilton report, Minister Bilal pointed out that the report confirms Syria's correct position. On President Asad's latest visit to Russia, the Minister described the visit as very successful, referring to the historic friendship connecting Syria and Russia.

End of summary.

12. Selected Headlines:

"President Asad receives a message from Iraqi President Talabani through VP Shara" (Government-owned Al-Ba'th, 12/28)

"Information Minister Bilal: All attempts to isolate Syria have failed. The problem of the US is in finding just solutions" (Government-owned Tishreen, 12/28)

"The popular sit-in continues. Lebanese opposition prepares parliamentary petition to bring Al-Saniora to trial. MP Saed: The aim of persistence in the International Tribunal is to retaliate against the resistance" (Government-owned Al-Ba'th, 12/28)

"Abbas awaits Secretary Rice's visit to revive 'back channels' for talks between Palestinians and Israelis. Olmert gives orders to launch limited military operation in the West Bank. Israel defers

tension-easing measures on Palestinians" (Government-owned Tishreen, 12/28)

"Five US soldiers, three Latvians killed in Iraq. The Al-Sadr movement announces the killing of one of its leaders by US fire" (Government-owned Tishreen, 12/28)

"Italian police capture a Mossad agent" (Government-owned Al-Thawra, 12/28)

"The Arab League demands that Ethiopia withdraw from Somalia" (Government-owned Tishreen, 12/28)

### 13. Editorial Block Quotes:

----- --  
"Will the Bush Administration Listen to Sensible People?"  
----- --

Isam Dari, an editorialist in government-owned Tishreen, commented (12/28): "Day after day visitors to Damascus come to learn the solid fact that Syria plays a basic and important role in the issues of the region and to discover Syria's sincere willingness to establish a just and comprehensive peace in a region that has suffered wars and tragedies for more than a century....

"Senator Specter believes that dialogue with Syria is necessary and that Congress must confront President Bush if he insists on not opening a dialogue with Damascus....

"Specter's statements offer new proof of the failure of American policy toward the issues of the region, from Iraq to Lebanon to the desired Middle East peace on which the Bush administration has

turned its back over six long years....

"Instead of using its political, military, and economic weight as a factor of stability, working for calm, peace, and prosperity, the United States used its influence and strike force to escalate conflicts, ignite wars, and feed sectarian and ethnic chauvinism in this region....

"Is it not time the US Administration listen to the sensible people of the world, including Americans, and reconsider its reckless policies, which have brought tragedies upon the world and disgrace upon Americans? We hope the Bush administration will listen to the wise people. It is still not too late, and better late than never."

----- --  
"We Are Ready For Peace, But..."  
----- --

Abd-al-Fattah al-Awad, Chief Editor of government-owned Al-Thawra, commented (12/28): "The Syrian people are convinced that Israel has never been serious about or ready for peace. If the calls coming from Israel are indeed responsive to the desire for peace, it is easy to prove sincerity through actions, simply returning the Golan and the occupied Arab territories....

"Current calls for dialogue and peace reflect a real need to take tangible steps in this regard. Such steps must be made under a main headline: the return of the occupied Golan and the occupied Arab territories and the achievement of a settlement providing for the establishment of an independent Palestinian state....

"Peacemaking needs wisdom, and we wonder if there are wise people in Israel and its backer, the United States...."

----- --  
"Too Difficult to Be Treated"  
----- --

Khalid al-Ashhab, a commentator in government-owned Al-Thawra, wrote (12/28): "Despite all its foolish political and ideological acts and its bitter defeat in the midterm elections, the US Administration continues to act as if it were a political master, not only in the concepts of democracy but also in international relations.

"Nations of the world, the American people in the lead, have come to realize that the Bush administration is the most unsuccessful teacher and practitioner of democracy and the worst model of relations among countries and societies, as it has brought upon the United States and the American people tremendous world hatred and hostility....

"It is not easy for a political mind used to stupidity and blunder, wrapped in arrogance and haughtiness, suddenly to become smart and shrewd and to turn against itself and its components only because it has seen its mistakes with its own eyes.

"This explains the response that the US Administration gave to the initiative for dialogue that Syria launched through President Asad in Moscow....

"We might find some excuse for the Bush administration when it shows some inflexibility, as this is in harmony with much of its policy. But we find no excuse for it when it threatens people with a big stone it has grown too weak to budge, let alone carry!"

-----

"Somalia, a New Iraq"

-----

Hanan Hamad, a columnist in government-owned Tishreen, wrote (12/28): "The soft Arab League statement on the Somali war reflects a state of weakness that dominates the Arab order....

"Instead of working to activate dialogue among Somali parties and achieve reconciliation and stability in the country, Arabs allowed one of the Somali parties to draw strength from foreigners. Neighbor Ethiopia came to clone Washington's experience in Iraq: 'An act of self defense' but on the land of others. A flagrant interference in the domestic affairs of an independent country and a member of the Arab League and the United Nations continues until 'the accomplishment of the mission' under the pretext of supporting 'legitimacy' and promoting democracy and 'international law....'

"Once again the Arab order fails to defend an Arab country against foreign invasion, feeling content with appeals and expressions of concern. The rest is known."

Corbin